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ABSTRACT

Four key topics in the implementation of Title II legislation are reviewed: (1) the Congressional intent of the Basic Skills Improvement Program (BSIP) and its two major focuses--demonstration and coordination; (2) what is meant by "basic skills"; (3) expected outcomes for the BSIP; and (4) standards for demonstration projects. Congress intended that the BSIP projects be demonstration projects and therefore be able to withstand the rigors of a validation procedure, contain good objectives, appropriate activities, and appropriate documentation, and allow for process and product evaluation in their designs. Congress singled out only four skills on which it would focus national concern through Title II: reading, mathematics, written and oral communications. Emphasis is not on developing minimum skills but on using a developmental continuum in developing skills. The BSIP does not endorse any method of teaching the basic skills and is more concerned about the consistency, feasibility, and proven effectiveness of approach(es) forwarded for a particular target population based on their assessed needs. (RL)

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TITLE II: THE NATIONAL BASIC SKILLS IMPROVEMENT

PROGRAM - WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

Grantees Orientation Meeting

September 21-24, 1980

Shirley A. Jackson
Director
Basic Skills Improvement Program

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TITLE II: THE NATIONAL BASIC SKILLS IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM -
WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

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INTRODUCTION

Once upon a time in the land of Fuzz, King Aling called in his cousin Ding and commanded, "Go ye out into all of Fuzzland and find me the goodest of men, whom I shall reward for his goodness."

"But how will I know one when I see one?" asked the Fuzzy.

"Why, he will be sincere," scoffed the king, and whacked off a leg for his impertinence.

So the Fuzzy hobbled away once more to look for the goodest of men. But again he returned, confused and emptyhanded.

"But how will I know one when I see one?" he pleaded.

"Why, he will have internalized his growing awareness," fumed the King, and whacked off another leg for his impertinence.

So the Fuzzy, now on his last leg, hopped out to continue his search. In time, he returned with the wisest, most sincere and dedicated Fuzzy in all of Fuzzland, and stood him before the King.

Why, this man won't do at all," reared the King. "he is much too thin to suit me." Whereupon, he whacked off the last leg of the Fuzzy, who fell to the floor with a squishy thump.

The moral of this fable is that . . . IF YOU CAN'T TELL ONE WHEN YOU SEE ONE, YOU MAY WIND UP WITHOUT A LEG TO STAND ON.

(From Robert Mager, Preparing Instructional Objectives)

PURPOSE OF THE MEETING

The major purpose of this orientation conference is to guide you in taking the "FUZZY" out of your basic skill demonstration projects so that we can all tell a Basic Skills demonstration project when we see one and the National Basic Skills Improvement Program (BSIP) will have a leg to stand on.

This means that we will have State and local projects that are descriptably and validably significant, to demonstrate how to improve the delivery of basic skills instruction to the children, youth and adults of this nation. Therefore, the focus of the orientation conference will be on: reviewing funded projects to guide their implementation. Specific considerations will include:

- (1) Basing project designs on current research in basic skills and learning theory
 - (2) Building on what we've learned from Right to Read to make better Basic Skills projects.
 - (3) Strengthening the objectives and evaluation designs of the projects to groom them for validation
 - (4) Coordinating basic skills programs at the National, State and local levels.
- We will also provide an understanding of what is meant by demonstration projects and the implication of the expectations inherent in the concept of being a demonstration project by:

- introducing you to the contracts that are planned to support the basic skills demonstration effort: (technical assistance, dissemination, education technology, Reading is Fundamental and the mathematics program)
- introducing you to our grants management system
- reviewing with you your grants management system
- familiarizing you with other projects funded in your category; in-school, out-of-school, parent participation, States

Our evaluation instrument will ask you to assess the degree to which you feel comfortable in these areas at the conclusion of the meeting.

Since the provisions of Title II were ably reviewed last night by Lorraine Mercier of our staff, I will not go over it, nor will I quote the traditional statistics which identify the need for basic skills Improvement. You quoted them all in your applications.

However, I would like to review four key topics which are our themes in this meeting and in our implementation of the Title II legislation:

- (1) The congressional intent of the Basic Skills Improvement Program and its two major focuses -- DEMONSTRATION AND COORDINATION
- (2) What we mean by "Basic Skills"
- (3) Expected Outcomes for the Basic Skills Improvement Program and
- (4) Standards for Demonstration Projects

THE CONGRESSIONAL INTENT

The Congress stated that it wished to "emphasize that grants awarded and contracts entered into under this title are to be DEMONSTRATION IN NATURE. It is hoped that those programs of merit will subsequently be REPLICATED in other school districts and become an integral part of our State educational systems."

The overall purpose of these programs is to help public and private agencies COORDINATE RESOURCES and IMPROVE their basic skills efforts for children, youth, and adults. (SENATE COMMITTEE REPORT.) The demonstration and diffusion targets for the projects do not have to be national; they may be local, State or national.

The program focus of this legislation is not to provide a new add-on program at the State or local level but rather to maximize the effectiveness of the assistance already being provided by stimulating the:

- (a) development of comprehensive State and local plans to improve the delivery of basic skills instruction for children, youth, and adults, based on assessed needs.
- (b) coordination and orchestration of Federal, State, and local programs to avoid conflict, unnecessary overlap, duplication, fragmentation in basic skills improvement efforts; thus creating a synergistic approach to basic skills improvement at the State and local levels.

In summary, then, Congress is asking us to come up with results from these projects that can make a broad-based difference in the way we design and deliver basic skills instruction to the wide variety of children, youth and adults from the varied circumstances and communities of this nation.

This focus places great emphasis on the need for us to select and refine significant projects with the potential for producing results that will matter beyond the confines of that individual project. This means the project design, objectives, and appropriate activities and evaluation results must be clearly stated, interrelated, credible and well documented.

Although we have a relatively small budget (\$35 million), we expect to make a large impact by working through a carefully orchestrated demonstration, assessment, and dissemination mode. This means we are seeking projects with the capability to demonstrate effective basic skills improvement and coordination programs.

Again, the projects that we are seeking are demonstration projects. This is an extremely important concept, and one that distinguishes these projects from the old projects funded under Title VII: National Reading Improvement Act. Right to Read projects were operated totally as development programs with an orientation only towards providing services targeted at the particular needs of the originating site. Not so with the Basic Skills Project, these projects must be able to withstand the rigors of a validation procedure if they are to be true demonstrations. Without good objectives, appropriate activities, appropriate documentation, and process and product evaluation in the project design, it is very unlikely that these projects will become nationally significant demonstrations.

THE "BASIC SKILLS" - - - WHAT DO WE MEAN?

What do we mean by Basic Skills? Most are reluctant to pronounce a hard and fast definition. Each school must determine for itself what it considers "basic" to its children's education. But fundamental to all education programs are readin', writin', and 'rithmetic. To these can be added the skills of speaking, listening, thinking and problem solving, and of course the skills of music and art, health education, citizenship education, functional competencies and the list could go on and on. These skills certainly are to be considered as essential to all learning and to survival in a modern society. However, the Congress has singled out four of these skills on which it would focus national concern through Title II: reading, mathematics, written and oral communications. These are specifically designated in the Title II,

Basic Skills Improvement legislation for demonstration of methods, practices, and materials effective in the teaching and learning of the specified basic skills and for assistance to States in developing programs to meet the needs of their communities.

Emphasis is not on developing minimum skills but on using a developmental continuum in developing skills. We are being asked to test the validity of ideas and to demonstrate the effectiveness of promising practices, procedures, products and programs in meeting the full spectrum of basic skills needs among our elementary and secondary school students and functionally illiterate adults.

The Basic Skills program supports no specific methodology or materials for improving basic skills. We believe that good programs anywhere on the continuum from holistic to specific skills, from learning basic skills through the arts or by using technology, can be made to work for children, youth and adults in the appropriate design and context. We do support, however, the diagnostic/prescriptive and mastery learning concepts of individualized instruction consistently borne out in the research as an instructional strategy that is effective in the teaching of the basic skills.

Further explication of what the specific basic skills might be is included in Standards: A Way of Measuring Success; What Do We Know About Standards For Effective Basic Skills Programs? (USOE, 1979), a publication developed by the BSIP which delineates program standards that were generated by the following major curriculum organizations:

Reading - International Reading Association
Mathematics- National Council of Teachers and Supervisors of Mathematics
Written Communication - National Council of Teachers of English
Oral Communications - America Speech - Language - Hearing Association
Speech Communication Association

In summary, the BSIP does not endorse any method of teaching reading, mathematics, oral or written communications, and using a specific methodology is not one of the review or selection criteria addressed in the BSIP's published regulations. We are more concerned about the consistency, feasibility, and proven effectiveness of approach(es) forwarded for a particular target population based on their assessed needs. Beyond the curriculum areas identified in the law, the BSIP does not define Basic Skills. That is reserved as a State and/or local prerogative. We do however, ask our grantees to define basic skills for their projects in terms of a learning philosophy, standards, and specific skills.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES FOR THE BASIC SKILLS IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

By its nature, a Federal grants program invites applicants to submit the best of their ideas within a general framework set forth in published rules and regulations. Rarely do we find a Federal program defining specific educational philosophies or approved processes and strategies which it would oblige applicants to follow. The intent of a grants program is to open up discussion and to widen the search for appropriate approaches to the needs in any given area. The BSIP supports this institutional position.

Nevertheless, each Federal program should set clearly before the public the outcomes which it expects to achieve within this broad framework. In this

context, the Basic Skills Improvement Program expects the following outcomes to be achieved by 1984:

A. Goals

The major goals which the Basic Skills Program expects to achieve during the four years for which Congress has provided authorization are these; first, to demonstrate the most effective methods, practices, and products in the teaching and learning of the basic skills and to make all areas of the country aware of these; second, to promote a national response to the need to coordinate resources in improving the learning and teaching of the basic skills; and, third, to build a substantial and important State leadership resource in the basic skills.

B. Objectives

There are five key objectives that the program expects to achieve during the four years:

1. TO DEVELOP AND VALIDATE FORTY (40) DEMONSTRATION MODELS FOR NATIONAL DISSEMINATION BY SEPTEMBER 30, 1983.

These models will demonstrate:

- (a) Effective instructional systems which promote increased achievement in reading, mathematics, oral and written communications for both in-school and out-of-school elementary, secondary, and adult students
- (b) Coordination in the utilization of all available Federal, State and local resources in basic skills to create a synergistic impact
- (c) Effective parent training programs which promote increased achievement by having parents or volunteers work with the schools to improve the educational achievement of the children

2. TO FACILITATE THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF 57 STATE BASIC SKILLS IMPROVEMENT PLANS AND AT LEAST ONE STATE BASIC SKILLS MODEL DEMONSTRATION PROGRAM PER STATE BY SEPTEMBER 30, 1984.
3. TO STIMULATE A NATIONAL DIALOG ON EFFECTIVE BASIC SKILLS IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES AT THE NATIONAL, STATE AND LOCAL LEVELS AND PUBLISH THE RESULTS OF THESE DIALOGS BY SEPTEMBER 30, 1984.

A secondary focus will be to develop or refine and disseminate nationally products that are effective in improving the delivery of basic skills instruction for the in-school and out-of-school children, youth and adults in the nation:

4. TO DEVELOP OR REFINE PRODUCTS EFFECTIVE IN DEVELOPING BASIC SKILLS, TO DESCRIBE THESE PRODUCTS IN A PUBLICATION CATALOG AND TO DISSEMINATE THEM NATIONALLY
5. TO DEVELOP AND DISSEMINATE NATIONALLY A PUBLICATION WHICH DESCRIBES THE FORTY (40) VALIDATED DEMONSTRATION MODELS AND ALL OTHER PROJECTS FUNDED BY THE BSIP BY SEPTEMBER 30, 1984.

The effort must ultimately be evaluated in light of whether or not it accomplished the above mentioned goals and objectives.

STANDARDS FOR DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS: THE DEMONSTRATION OF BASIC SKILLS PRACTICES, METHODS, AND MATERIALS

Demonstration programs in the Department of Education are intended to be based on research and on the development of research findings in given fields. While this tie between research and development and demonstration activities has not been as structured and planned as it might be, Congress normally authorizes demonstrations only when there has been first some research and development which would warrant support for testing these ideas and practices in the real world of schools, colleges and out-of-school settings.

In this ideal scheme of things, a successful demonstration program would have to show the validity of the idea or process or material before disseminating it. Dissemination is the final step in the process of exploring and validating ideas, and, again ideally, would precede their implementation.

In this context, it is an assumption of the Basic Skills Improvement Program that extensive research and development bearing on these matters exists, and validation of many of the proposed reforms has taken place. The task now is to translate this knowledge known to exist into regular and systematic practice and to enable schools to coordinate the multiple basic skills resources available to them so that knowledge is made available to students in the most comprehensive and effective way possible.

There are several important steps in the carrying out of a demonstration:

- (1) It must begin with a careful assessment of the need it addresses;
- (2) It must include a description of the major research done in the area;
- (3) It must establish specific, measurable objectives and carefully defined activities designed to meet those objectives;
- (4) It must include a plan for recording progress towards those objectives and for an evaluation of the results achieved;
- (5) It must include plans for validating, then disseminating those results.

President Carter, in his 1978 International Literacy Address said, "Education is one of the most important gifts our society can give its people . . . Especially in our modern world - adequate communication skills are essential to improve the lives of all people, and guarantee their basic human rights." The President went on to say that every illiterate adult is an indictment of us all.

INDEED, BASIC SKILLS IS A B.A. . . . RIGHT! DON'T YOU AGREE?